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Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. WORK TO ENSURE THE IMMEDIATE AND SAFE RELEASE OF LEAH SHARIBU

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country largely split between the predominately Muslim north and the predominately Christian south. Nigeria has been experiencing a humanitarian crisis and rapidly deteriorating situations for many of its citizens for some time. Christians face a true threat from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram, ISIS, and increasingly the Fulani Herdsmen, a group of Islamic nomadic herders.¹ It is estimated that since May of 2011 Boko Haram has killed more than 37,500 people, displaced 2.4 million, and created nearly 244,000 refugees within Nigeria.²

Children within Nigeria are particularly vulnerable. According to UNICEF, atrocities carried out by Boko Haram and other jihadist groups have orphaned nearly 60,000 children, and forced 1.4 million children from their homes.³ Furthermore, according to another recent report by UNICEF, “in northeastern Nigeria, abduction of children is a frequent occurrence. Since 2013, over 1,000 children have suffered this fate as the hands of Boko Haram”.⁴

2. BACKGROUND

Clearly, the terrorist group known as Boko Haram poses a grave threat to the safety and wellbeing of children in Nigeria. One young girl in particular, Leah Sharibu, stands before us as the face of the atrocities that are targeted towards and being carried out against children and Christians in Nigeria. Leah was abducted in February of 2018 by Boko Haram, and continues to remain a hostage to this day because she refuses to renounce her Christian faith. On 14 May 2020, Leah turned 17 marking the third time she has spent her birthday as a captive of Boko Haram. This cannot be tolerated any longer.⁵

3. LEAH SHARIBU

In February of 2018 Boko Haram insurgents raided the Government Girls Science Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State and abducted 110 schoolgirls.⁶ Approximately four weeks later, Boko Haram released 104 of the schoolgirls while five of the girls died while being held captive, the only girl to remain captive is Leah Sharibu.⁷ To this day, Leah remains captive for one reason, her refusal to renounce her Christian faith.

1 *Nigeria*, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/>.

2 *Boko Haram in Nigeria*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflictracker?marker=19#!/conflict/boko-haram-in-nigeria>, (last visited 26 May. 2020)

3 *Children in Conflict, Boko Haram Crisis*, UNICEF, <https://www.unicefusa.org/mission/emergencies/conflict/boko-haram-crisis> (last visited 3 June 2020).

4 *Lost at Home: The Risks and Challenges for Internally Displaced Children and the Urgent Actions Needed to Protect Them*, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/media/68826/file/Lost-at-home-risks-and-challenges-for-IDP-children-2020.pdf> (last visited 3 June 2020).

5 *Leah Sharibu Turned 17 In Boko Haram Captivity*, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN, (18 May 2020), <https://www.persecution.org/2020/05/18/leah-sharibu-turned-17-boko-haram-captivity/>.

6 Stephanie Busari & Bukola Adebayo, *More Than 100 Girls Missing After Raid on Nigerian School*, CNN (26 Feb. 2018), <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/25/africa/nigeria-boko-haramfather/index.html>.

7 *Id.*

On 19 February 2020, Leah Sharibu's mother spoke at an event in London commemorating the second anniversary of Leah's kidnapping. Outside of the Nigerian High Commission, Rebecca Sharibu gave an impassioned plea calling for the release of her daughter.

Today Leah has spent two years in captivity. We don't know where Leah is, we don't know the condition or the situation Leah is in. I want to thank you once again for the encouragement I receive from all of you, and plead with you to continue praying until Leah's out. I'm pleading with [the UK] government and with our Nigerian government, with President Buhari . . . to fulfil his promises that he has made to me personally, that he is going to rescue Leah and ensure that she is released, and not just Leah, all the others in captivity.⁸

Time is of the utmost importance for addressing Leah Sharibu's case as she is in serious danger and immediate action must be taken to free her before it is too late. On 14 May 2020, Leah turned 17 marking the third time she spent her birthday imprisoned.⁹

According to the spokeswoman for Leah's family, "an aid worker from Plateau State, Jennifer Ukambong, who was released in January 2020 after staying nearly one month in Boko Haram captivity, had said Leah Sharibu was [still alive and] living somewhere close to Lake Chad".¹⁰

4. REQUEST

Clearly, Leah's situation is a dire one. It is imperative that the U.N. take swift action and work with the government of Nigeria to ensure that Leah and all others who remain captured are returned home safely and to put an end to the atrocities being carried out in Nigeria by Boko Haram and the Fulani herdsmen. No one should have to live under the fear of being abducted, enslaved or killed.

⁸ *Nigeria: Leah Sharibu's Mother Joins London Protest On Second Anniversary of Abduction*, THE NIGERIAN VOICE, (19 Feb. 2020), <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/285362/nigeria-leah-sharibus-mother-joins-london-protest-on-secon.html>.

⁹ *Leah Sharibu Turned 17 In Boko Haram Captivity*, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN, (18 May 2020), <https://www.persecution.org/2020/05/18/leah-sharibu-turned-17-boko-haram-captivity/>.

¹⁰ *Leah Sharibu's Parents Accuse Government of Deceiving Nigerians*, SAHAREPORTERS (4 May 2020), <http://sahareporters.com/2020/05/04/leah-sharibu's-parents-accuse-government-deceiving-nigerians>.